

Thomas O. Larkin House
510 Calle Principal, Monterey
Monterey County, Monterey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
1000 Geary Street
San Francisco, California

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PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT
HISTORIC BUILDING SURVEY

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THOMAS O, LARKIN HOUSE
Monterey, Monterey County, California

ADDRESS 510 Calle Principal, Monterey, California
OWNER Mrs. Alice Larkin Toulmin - Deeded to State of California
OCCUPANT State of California
USE Historical Monument

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Larkin House, built between 1834 and 1837, was Monterey's first recorded two-storied adobe. The monument is significant as a record of the period of the Mexican capitol of Alta California, as well as the transitional period of development of Monterey as an American community. It was the home of Thomas Oliver Larkin, the most important American residing in California during the late Mexican and Early American periods.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Physical History The original owner of the property was Thomas Oliver Larkin, who was born in Charlestown, Massachusetts, on September 16, 1802. Larkin came to Monterey on April 13, 1832, and worked for his half-brother, Captain John B. R. Cooper. In 1833 he married Mrs. Rachel Hobson Holmes, and in 1834 began planning the building which has since become known as the Larkin House. His plans included that his home should also be his place of business, and in April 1835, Larkin purchased a solar (building site) of fifty varas (one vara equals two and three-quarters feet) at what is now the corner of Calle Principal and Jefferson Street. Larkin recorded every expenditure made for building his home and the facts may be obtained from the original Thomas Oliver Larkin "Account Books", which are part of the manuscript collection of the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley, California.

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The records indicate the house was constructed in stages, and by January 1838 was completed as a two-story structure. An 1842 lithograph shows the Larkin House with the second story porch. It also shows a chimney on the south wall which is not in existence today. However, there is evidence of a fireplace in this position in the south interior wall of the second story southeast corner bedroom. It is impossible at this writing to determine the validity of this fireplace or to establish the date when this change might have occurred. In the Monterey Cypress, dated December 12, 1891, it states that Mr. Jacob P. Leese, who acquired the property in 1850, improved the house by the addition of a balcony, several windows, and a door in the back upper story. If there was a fireplace in this position it may have been removed about this time. Mr. Leese also had a coat of colored cement put over the adobe walls, which is the condition that exists at the present time.

It is to be noted that there existed a two-story frame house attached to the south porch of the Larkin House. This addition was constructed by Jacob Leese and in 1905 was sold and moved by Robert F. Johnson who acquired the property in 1902. It is suggested that Mr. Johnson may have rented the property previously and was merely clearing the title in 1902. His daughter, Mrs. Juanita Johnson Cooper, the widow of J.B.R. Cooper who was the grandson of Larkin's half-brother, states that "her sister Inez was born in the house on January 20, 1901, just two days before the death of Queen Victoria (Jan. 22, 1901), and her brother died in the house two years before Inez was born".

Evidence of a stairwell on the south wall was confirmed by Mrs. Cooper. It was an exterior "boxed-in" stairway which was removed by Mr. Johnson when he altered and glazed the southwest corner of the upper porch. This is the present condition of this elevation. He also added the first addition on the west elevation as a kitchen and the corner fireplace in the room considered the Larkin office. Mr. Johnson added a "river-rock" facing and the benches to the fireplace in the room which is north of the stairwell on the first floor. The next owner added the present plaster finish.

In 1922 Mrs. Alice Larkin Toulmin purchased the property. As her private residence, Mrs. Toulmin carried on the work of restoration, and to some extent modernization, until now the Larkin house is one of the most beautiful adobes in California. She added the servant quarters to the kitchen on the west elevation, the powder room on the first floor, the bathrooms on the second floor and the interior second

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floor hall arrangement leading into the northeast corner bedroom from the stairwell. The first floor porches, which were originally pisé de terre (rammed earth), were bricked in 1938. The interiors are furnished in fine eighteenth and nineteenth century French and English furnishings, as well as oriental furniture and object de art. It was deeded in this condition to State of California as the Larkin House State Historical Monument in 1957. The building is open to the public every Tuesday through Sunday from 10: A.M. to 5:00 P.M. with no admission charge.

Historical Events This house has a significant record in the events pertaining to California history. It was the residence and place of business of Thomas Oliver Larkin during the Mexican period, and attained fame as "the first de facto United States Capitol in California".¹ In 1843 - 44, when Larkin was the United States Consul, the house was the center of official life as well as the leading place of business. In 1847, it was the American Military Headquarters of General Kearney and his Adjutant General, Lieutenant Sherman. The house has always figured prominently in the social activities of the Monterey community, and was the residence of Robert Johnson when he was Mayor of Monterey.

1. Parker, R. J., Chapters in the Early Life of Thomas Oliver Larkin, p. 63.

Supplemental Material

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Kirker, Harold, California Architecture in the Nineteenth Century; a Social History, (Berkeley, 1957). Thesis (Ph.D. in History) - University of California, June 1957.

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Authorities Consulted

Mrs. Amelia Kneass, Curator, Pacific House State Historical Monument, Monterey, California.

Miss Myfawny Lloyd, Curator. Larkin House State Historical Monument, Monterey, California.

Prepared by

Richard C. Peters
RICHARD C. PETERS
Architect

September 1959

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

General - This two-storied balconied adobe is an excellent example of the Mexican (Monterey) colonial architecture which prevailed throughout Alta California. Its distinctive construction with the hip roof, balcony, and veranda was responsible for the establishment of the now popular "Monterey" style of architecture. While little is known of the original gardens, it is felt that the present landscaping closely approximates the informal quality of earlier gardens. The interior furnishings, though not of the period contemporary with the structure, enhance the excellence of the architectural heritage.

Exterior - The Larkin House is approximately 46'-6" wide and 52'-6" long. The foundations are probably rough stone which is common to this area. The walls are load bearing sun dried adobe bricks of a general measurement of 11" by 24" thick where it was possible to check dimensions. However, judging from the varying thickness of measured walls it is possible that there may be bricks of other sizes or that some of the walls may be filled with rubble stone and an adobe brick and plaster finish. All the exterior walls, except the southeast garden entrance wall, were plastered with adobe plaster and painted. The bond was not

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evident. A native stone called chalk rock is used in the garden entrance wall.

The exterior terraces are brick but originally were pisé de terre (rammed earth). The balconies are supported by 6" square irregularly spaced wood columns. The south balcony was added in 1891 and the southwest corner was altered and glass enclosed in approximately 1905. It is supported on irregularly spaced columns, which are less refined in design than the framework of the north and east balconies. The balcony flooring is 1" by 8" wood plank.

There are four original exterior door openings on the first floor. They are the double door opening on the north wall, the two single door openings on the east wall and the single opening nearest the southeast corner of the south wall. The door openings on the north and east wall of the second floor are considered original. All the second story openings open onto the balcony. The doors in these openings vary from three to six lights and are wood paneled in the lower half. There are five exterior screen doors of later addition.

The windows of both stories are fitted with double hung redwood sash and vary from twenty to twenty-four lights. There are two windows in the north wall which are protected by iron grilles which were a later addition.

The roof is a simple hip roof with the sides extended in gable form to cover the exterior balconies. The balconies have a simple flat wood fascia with modern gutters attached. The roof is cedar shingles. The addition to the south balcony is wood frame with irregular fixed glass lights.

Interior - The plan of the building is a basic adobe plan with room to room circulation. (Additions have changed two of the interior door openings on the second floor). All major rooms on both floors have access to exterior circulation.

The Larkin House has an interior wood stairway raising from the entrance hall. The first floor room to the south of the stairhall shows an indication of having been partitioned into two rooms by a wall similar to the existing redwood partition between this room and the stairhall.

There is a trap door in the first and second floor northeast corner rooms. The two small first floor rooms on the west side

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may have been original Larkin extensions due to the irregular thickness of the now interior adobe walls. In the northwest first floor room there is built a wall safe which is considered a Larkin innovation.

The principal rooms of the first floor are floored with random width redwood and pine planking, 1" by 3" pine flooring and linoleum. The 12" square burned tile, common to the Monterey area, occurs in the back hall of the first floor and is not considered original. The principal rooms of the second floor are floored with 1" by 12" redwood planking, 1" x 3" pine flooring and linoleum.

The interior walls are adobe plaster painted or papered and painted. There are solid redwood plank partitions on the first floor. The splayed window jambs and flat heads are either adobe plaster painted or lined with painted redwood boards. The interior and exterior shutters are painted redwood.

The ceilings of the first and second floor are either exposed random width board painted or paper and plaster painted. The ceiling joists when exposed are generally a whip or circular sawn finish and painted.

The trim throughout is assumed to be redwood. The fireplace trim and mantle is considered to be original although no positive date can be attributed. Some hardware has been replaced in the building. All lighting is of modern installation as is the central heating system and the burgular alarm.

The service buildings replace earlier structures of undetermined use but it is assumed there were stables, oven houses, servants quarters and privies.

Site - The building is oriented with the main axis north and south giving the front elevation eastern exposure. The remaining lot is enclosed with chalk rock and adobe walls which are capped by a band of shingles and clay tiles. This area is developed as a garden with service buildings. Sherman's Quarters CAL-127, is located on this property.

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